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Mr. William F. Caton  
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Subject: Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions in the  
Telecommunications Act of 1996, CC Docket No. 96-98

Dear Mr. Caton:

Enclosed please find the original and sixteen copies of the General Services Administration/Department of Defense Reply Comments for filing in the above-referenced proceeding.

Sincerely,

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**May 30, 1996**

**Table of Contents**

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Summary .....	i
I. Introduction .....	2
II. Provisions of Section 251 .....	4
A. Scope of the Commission's Regulations .....	4
B. Obligations Imposed by Section 251(c) on "Incumbent LECs" .....	9
C. Obligations Imposed on "Local Exchange Carriers" by Section 251(b) .....	10
III. Conclusion .....	14

## SUMMARY

In these Reply Comments, GSA/DOD responds to the comments of 160 filing parties whose positions often sharply conflict. GSA/DOD urges the Commission to adhere wherever possible to the middle ground between the more extreme positions of these parties.

GSA/DOD supports the call by the Department of Justice and the non-incumbent LEC parties for national interconnection standards. GSA/DOD believes that all parties, including the state commissions, will benefit from such guidelines.

GSA/DOD believes the controversy over the appropriate pricing of unbundled network elements is best resolved through individual carrier negotiations. The Commission should, however, establish total service long-run incremental costs as the price floor and fully distributed costs as the price ceiling for network elements.

Finally, GSA/DOD agrees with those parties who contend that the "bill and keep" method of reciprocal compensation is appropriate for transport and termination, assuming reasonably balanced traffic. GSA/DOD recommends that the Commission adopt bill and keep as a "preferred outcome" which it would likely prescribe should a negotiation reach it for resolution.

**BEFORE THE  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20554**

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In the Matter of  
  
Implementation of the Local Competition  
Provisions in the Telecommunications Act  
of 1996

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CC Docket No. 96-98

**REPLY COMMENTS OF THE  
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
AND THE  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

The General Services Administration and the United States Department of Defense ("GSA/DOD"), on behalf of the customer interests of all of the Federal Executive Agencies ("FEAs") submit these Reply Comments in response to the Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ("NPRM"), FCC 96-182, released April 19, 1996. In this NPRM, the Commission requests comments and replies on rules to implement the local competition provisions of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 ("1996 Act"), Sections 251-3.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996).

## **I. Introduction**

A total of 160 parties submitted comments on the Commission's Interconnection NPRM. These parties can generally be classified into six broad categories:

- Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers ("ILECs"),
- Interexchange Carriers ("IXCs"),
- State Public Service Commissions ("PSCs"),
- User Parties,
- Cable System Operators ("Cable Parties") and Competitive Local Exchange Carriers ("CLECs"), and
- Wireless Carriers.

While the comments filed by parties within these categories do not agree on all matters raised in the NPRM, they usually reflect a general consensus at least on the broad policy issues. Unfortunately, the consensus within one group of parties is often sharply at odds with that of other groups, so that the Commission is confronted with the unenviable prospect of having to make decisions that are certain to incur the displeasure of at least some of the participants in this proceeding.

As GSA/DOD has noted in virtually all of its pleadings, the FEAs have adopted a policy of acquiring as many telecommunications services as possible using competitive procurement procedures. Experience has demonstrated that telecommunications providers offer the lowest cost services, consistent with quality requirements, when they

are obliged to anticipate competitive bids from alternative carriers.

It is therefore very much in the FEAs' interest that the Commission's rules facilitate, rather than inhibit, the rapid development of effective competition among telecommunications carriers. The Commission's rules will facilitate the development of competition only if they enjoy sufficient support among the stakeholders so as to expedite the implementation of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 ("1996 Act"). On the other hand, the Commission's rules could greatly inhibit competition if they are so abhorrent to particular interests that they invite resistance in the form of court challenges. The worst possible outcome would be a gridlock of court stays that affect not just the specific issues under contention but the entire process of implementing interconnection among telecommunications carriers.

For this reason, GSA/DOD urges the Commission to adhere wherever possible to the middle ground between the more extreme positions of the parties. This is particularly critical on issues that are likely to affect the fundamental viability of a stakeholder's position in the market or in the regulatory process.

## **II. Provisions of Section 251**

Fortunately, not all of the 400 issues on which the Commission has sought comment are likely to affect the fundamental viability of a stakeholder's position. Even many of the areas on which there is disagreement reflect only the preferences and predilections of the parties, not necessarily their vital interests. While these issues are important and cannot be ignored, they do not threaten the implementation of the 1996 Act, which is the principal concern of GSA/DOD.

Review of the comments reveals that one section of the 1996 Act stands out as a major source of seemingly irreconcilable differences that affect the vital interests of a number of parties. That is Section 252(d), relating to pricing standards. There are broadly three areas of disagreement concerning this section. The first is the scope of the Commission's regulations, the second is the pricing standards that apply to incumbent LECs under §251(c), and the third is the pricing of interconnections among LECs pursuant to §251(b).

### **A. Scope of the Commission's Regulations**

The vital interest that is threatened by the scope of the Commission's regulations is that of the state PSCs. Most of the PSCs submitting comments, along with the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners ("NARUC") object strongly to the "detailed prescriptive overlay" of the NPRM which they regard will remove their discretion to explore



varying options and employ different approaches to the policies enunciated in the 1996 Act.

NARUC accepts that the 1996 Act provides for Commission prescriptions with respect to number portability, resale, unbundled network elements, number administration and the recovery of administration costs. However, NARUC cites §152(b) of the Communications Act as assigning to the state commissions exclusive jurisdiction with respect to "...charges, classifications, practices, service, facilities or regulations for or in connection with intrastate communications service by wire or radio of any carrier..."<sup>2</sup> NARUC therefore does not accept that the 1996 Act authorizes the Commission to regulate pricing matters affecting intrastate services which, according to NARUC, includes interconnection among LECs. NARUC, along with several individual state commissions, argue that the traditional distinctions between interstate and intrastate rate regulation continue to apply to LEC interconnection rates and pricing.<sup>3</sup>

In the opposite camp are the IXC, CLECs and Cable parties who question neither the authority nor the propriety of the Commission to prescribe detailed and specific rules governing the costing of the network elements offered for use and resale by the ILECs. AT&T, for example, offers five very specific rules covering the definition of the Total Service Long Run Incremental Costs ("TSLRIC") that should be employed to price the

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<sup>2</sup> Comments of NARUC, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Id., pp. 16-20.

eleven network elements that it recommends the Commission mandate be unbundled for purchase by alternative LECs.<sup>4</sup> The National Cable Television Association ("NCTA") proposes that the Commission mandate a TSLRIC pricing standard based on a proxy model.<sup>5</sup> MFS Communications Company ("MFS") would have the Commission prescribe detailed pricing standards, leaving the state commissions with jurisdiction only to set specific prices.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, there is the Department of Justice ("DOJ"), which asserts, as the first of five fundamental principles, the following:

First, the Act contemplates, and rapid, successful local entry requires national rules governing incumbent obligations to provide the basic prerequisites for entry, including clear national rules governing the scope of unbundling and interconnection requirements and the principles governing the prices at which essential services and facilities of incumbent monopolists will be provided to entrants.<sup>7</sup>

GSA/DOD is already on record as favoring an interpretation of the 1996 Act that does not distinguish between the interstate and intrastate aspects of interconnection service and network elements for purposes of Sections 251 and 252.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, GSA has

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<sup>4</sup> Comments of AT&T, pp.55-61.

<sup>5</sup> Comments of NCTA, p.49-54.

<sup>6</sup> Comments of MFS, pp 49-63.

<sup>7</sup> Comments of DOJ, pp. 5,6.

<sup>8</sup> Comments of GSA/DOD, p. 6.

previously expressed the view that the present system of inflated interstate access charges cannot long endure in an environment in which LEC interconnection arrangements are based on cost and on mutual compensation.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, GSA/DOD supports the call by DOJ and the non-incumbent carrier parties for national standards.

GSA/DOD is sensitive, however, to the state PSCs' concern for the apparent erosion of their jurisdiction over terms, conditions and prices of services that appear to be clearly intrastate in character. However, it is inconceivable that Congress intended to extend the traditional approach of interstate and intrastate jurisdictional separations to the field of local exchange interconnections. Under that approach, the "relative use" principles of Smith v. Illinois Bell Tel. Co.<sup>10</sup> would apply to interstate toll traffic moving from one LEC to another. That is, interstate calls delivered from an IXC to ILEC would then have to be transferred to a CLEC at interstate local interconnection rates. Clearly, Congress intended a new jurisdictional paradigm with respect to local exchange interconnection. Congress has written general policies that apply to all interconnection, without regard to the origin or destination of the call. In §251(d), it directed the Commission to promulgate rules implementing the terms of §251. Those rules are to be used in establishing rates for

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<sup>9</sup> Interconnection Between Local Exchange Carriers and Commercial Mobile Radio Service Providers, CC Docket No. 95-185, Equal Access and Interconnection Obligations Pertaining to Commercial Mobile Radio Service Providers, CC Docket No. 94-54, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, released January 11, 1996 ("CMRS Interconnection"), Comments of GSA, March 4, 1996, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> 282 U.S. 133 (1930).

unbundled network elements and by the state commission if they are called upon to arbitrate the intercarrier agreements pursuant to §252(b) of the 1996 Act. There are no "interstate" and "intrastate" local exchange interconnection rates.

GSA/DOD submits that the broader self-interest of the state PSCs should militate in favor of more detailed Commission standards and guidelines. DOJ makes a valid point that the 1996 Act's reliance on negotiations places a very high premium on preexisting legal and regulatory standards that can guide the parties in resolving disputes.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, the incentive to the ILECs will be to debate, disagree and delay, hoping for a protracted arbitration before the state PSC, and if that is not successful, before the Commission itself. Absence of clear and fairly detailed standards constitutes an invitation for the ILECs to "game" a system where the status quo favors their interests.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in the long run, the state PSCs are probably better off under the Commission's more prescriptive approach.

Finally, GSA/DOD must refer the Commission's attention to the national security concerns expressed by the Secretary of Defense in separate Reply Comments. These concerns support a national approach to interconnection rulemaking.

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<sup>11</sup> Comments of DOJ, pp.9-11.

<sup>12</sup> Quite possibly, this strategy explains the unanimity with which the ILECs favor only "broad guidelines" and "general principles" with respect to the Commission's interconnection rules. See, e.g., Comments of Ameritech, p.5; Bell Atlantic, p. 2; BellSouth, p. 5; Pacific Telesis, p. 7.

**B. Obligations Imposed by Section 251(c) on "Incumbent LECs"**

Section 251(c) relates to the pricing of unbundled network elements that the incumbent LECs must make available on a dedicated basis to competing carriers. DOJ and virtually all of the non-incumbent carrier parties favor a TSLRIC pricing standard,<sup>13</sup> while the incumbent LECs insist that such a standard would result in their inability to recover the common, overhead and embedded costs that they have incurred. They favor instead a fully allocated costing standard.<sup>14</sup>

In its initial comments, GSA/DOD proposed to resolve this anticipated dispute by recommending that the Commission establish TSLRIC as the price floor and fully distributed costs as the price ceiling for unbundled network elements. Cox Communications, Inc. ("Cox") endorses the same approach.<sup>15</sup>

GSA/DOD believes that the dispute between TSLRIC and fully distributed costs will prove to be more apparent than real. The difference between the two can be great when the objective is to determine the cost of a service that shares common facilities with other services. But that is not the issue here. The unbundled network elements at issue in §251(c) are to be dedicated to the use of the alternative carrier. They therefore use little common plant, and that which they do use can appropriately be apportioned as

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Comments of DOJ, p. 26; MCI, p. 61; Time Warner, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Comments of the Southern New England Telephone Company ("SNET"), pp. 29-30; Bell Atlantic, pp. 35-40; BellSouth, pp. 49-57.

<sup>15</sup> Comments of Cox, p. 30.

incremental in the long run to the element in question. Nor are overheads an issue if it is recognized that, over the long run, a large carrier with many network elements incurs more overhead costs than a small carrier with few network elements. Overheads, in short, are incremental.

### **C. Obligations Imposed on "Local Exchange Carriers" by Section 251(b)**

While §251(c) obliges incumbent LECs to unbundle and offer for lease their principal network elements, §251(b) obliges all LECs to negotiate in good faith to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of traffic. The distinction is that the "transport and termination" services referenced in §251(b) use the common facilities of both ILECs and CLECs, while the network element rates in §251(c) involve the dedicated lease of facilities of the ILECs only.

Here, the standards are different. Section 252(d)(2) establishes "additional costs" as the standard, not to exclude mutual recovery mechanisms such as "bill and keep."

The ILECs abhor bill and keep. Notwithstanding that bill and keep has been explicitly approved by Congress in §252(d)(2)(A)(i) of the 1996 Act, most of the ILECs argue that it violates the terms of the Act that require compensation for costs and is therefore unlawful.<sup>16</sup> The most that they will say for bill and keep is that it may be acceptable if all parties agree to it. By implication, the Commission is to know that the

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Comments of Rural Telephone Coalition ("RTC"), p. 23; Cincinnati Bell Telephone Company ("CBT"), pp. 37-39; Ameritech, pp. 78-79.

ILECs will never do so.

In its Reply Comments in the CMRS Interconnection docket, GSA drew a distinction between bill and keep arrangements at the LEC's end office from those that apply from any "meet point" such as a tandem switch.<sup>17</sup> GSA emphasized that bill and keep from an end office is not inconsistent with the requirement for cost recovery because there is very little additional cost associated with such a termination. Most of the costs relate to the subscriber loop which is insensitive to the presence or absence of the call. In the CMRS docket, the Commission had proposed to mandate bill and keep from the end office as an interim measure. GSA supported that approach for CMRS call terminations, and it recommends it be adopted as a permanent solution for landline calling in this docket. Each carrier should be responsible for its own customer access functions.

GSA's approach to the transfer of CMRS calls at tandem switches was different. GSA acknowledged that there may be additional volume-sensitive costs associated with terminating the call, specifically the use of the tandem switch and the transport facilities to the end office. Additionally, because tandem switching may substitute for dedicated facilities to the end office, the economic tradeoff of this substitution might be distorted if the tandem switching alternative is effectively priced at zero cost.<sup>18</sup> For these reasons, GSA proposed that tandem switching and transport of CMRS calls be priced at the

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<sup>17</sup> CMRS Interconnection, Reply Comments of GSA, March 25, 1996, pp. 7-11.

<sup>18</sup> Id., pp.9-11.

incremental cost of the activities involved.

These arguments in favor of usage pricing for tandem switching and transport are more persuasive for CMRS interconnections than for interconnection between two landline carriers. CMRS calls effectively originate at a single point, the Mobile Telephone Switching Office ("MTSO") of the CMRS carrier. On the landline end, they terminate at any point on the system. The reverse is true for calls terminating on CMRS systems; they "home" into the MTSO from points all over the landline network. Thus, in the CMRS industry, there is no symmetry between the call terminating functions of the CMRS provider and those of the landline carrier. Bill and keep for the transport function could be discriminatory against the landline carrier, particularly as many CMRS carriers impose charges on calls terminating on their systems.

Between landline carriers, however, there is symmetry at least in the functions performed. Both carriers in a local interconnection agreement are charged with the same requirements, which are to connect the call to the serving end office and deliver it from there to the customer's premise. A presumption of matching call termination costs is at least reasonable, and for this reason, bill and keep for the entire call terminating activity is not unacceptable so long as there is an approximate balance of traffic between the carriers.

On the other hand, the hostility of the ILECs to bill and keep militates against a mandatory prescription of this approach for intercarrier settlements. Moreover, there may be particular instances such as highly unbalanced traffic, where bill and keep is not an



equitable solution.

For these reasons, GSA/DOD recommends that the Commission adopt bill and keep as a "preferred outcome" which, assuming balanced traffic and a reasonable presumption of similar call termination costs, it would likely prescribe as the arbitrated solution should an unresolved negotiation reach the Commission. The carriers and the state commissions would be on notice that bill and keep is the favored arrangement, but they would not be required to adopt it if there are valid reasons to employ the alternative of explicit call termination charges.

May 30, 1996

**III. Conclusion**

GSA/DOD urges the Commission to issue rules to implement the interconnection provisions of the 1996 Act in the manner described in these Reply Comments.

Respectfully Submitted,

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May 30, 1996

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